

## FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN / ENVIRONMENT

# Don't grouse about shooting – estates benefit wildlife and the economy too

With 2018 well up and running, sporting estates across Scotland are looking forward to the year ahead, as well as taking stock of the season recently ended.

Many grouse moors had to contend with difficult spring weather last year but the season remained positive in most places, with grouse numbers high enough to allow shoot days. This ensured that rural areas continued to experience social and economic benefits from domestic and international visitors coming to Scotland for our world class country sports tourism.

Even where grouse numbers were not high enough for shooting, we still saw year-round conservation, benefiting ground nesting birds and other wildlife, undertaken by gamekeepers and estate staff who are employed whether shooting takes place or not.

This year is particularly noteworthy for the sector with an independent review of moorland management announced last year by Cabinet Secretary Roseanna Cunningham.

The expert group that will conduct the review is in place to take forward the government's stated core objective: "This new group will look at what we can do to balance our commitment to tackling wildlife crime with grouse moor management practices, so it continues to contribute to our rural economy, while being sustainable and compliant with the law."

The Scottish Moorland Group,



**Tim Baynes warns against polarising the debate on moorlands and outlines progress in conservation**

whose members make up the majority of grouse estates across the country, has already indicated its willingness to assist. It is in all our interests to have thorough and independent research to inform public policy and help lay to rest misunderstandings around grouse moor management.

Concerns about wildlife crime were a catalyst for this review. Persecution of birds of prey is unacceptable and widely condemned in the sector. Those who engage in such activity should face the consequences and Scotland has some of the most stringent legislation and penalties to deal with such cases.

There has been significant progress over the last five years, with a continued long-term decline in bird of prey crime, according to government statistics. That said, this is an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed.

We have also seen new models of partnership to close the perceived gap between moorland managers and conservation groups. The Partnership Against Wildlife Crime Scotland has aided efforts to reduce wildlife crime, whilst the East Cairn-

gorms Moorland Partnership is leading the way for moorland estates to work together and with the Cairngorms National Park. In the Heads Up for Harriers project, the majority of estates volunteering are driven by grouse moors, and 2017 has seen a bumper year with 37 chicks successfully fledging. We also have the South of Scotland Golden Eagle project, with estates volunteering to get this iconic bird re-established.

The review panel will also look at the intensity of moorland management and examine matters such as muirburn and mountain hare populations. These issues have been the focus of work at Scotland's Moorland Forum in the last two years, resulting in new codes of best practice endorsed by the government.

There is also a need to examine what has happened where grouse management has ceased, such as in Wales, and the detrimental impact it has had. With the conclusions of the Langholm Moor demonstration project due to be published this year, which examine the conflict between raptor populations and grouse moor



↑ Grouse shooting makes a substantial contribution to the Scottish economy and managed estates are also effective in conservation of rare birds, says Tim Baynes of the Scottish Moorland Group

management, it is important to understand that rare moorland birds such as curlew, lapwing and golden plover are increasingly reliant on the management of gamekeepers as populations decline elsewhere.

The Scottish Government has recognised the need to examine the

substantial contribution that grouse shooting makes to the rural economy. This is even more important on moorlands where alternative land uses are limited by climate, soil and altitude and would thus affect vital employment, paid for privately. This has added importance at the time of

Brexit, when other land uses, such as hill farming, may face substantial change.

The debate around grouse shooting is too polarised. However, those willing to work constructively and collaboratively do achieve results, particularly in conservation of spe-

cies and habitat. Those of us who are passionate about shooting, and the multitude of benefits it provides, hope that cooperation and partnership will prevail and help build on what is a Scottish rural success story. *Tim Baynes, director of the Scottish Moorland Group.*



**Drones, laser scarers and mobile phone apps – how technology is helping conservation**

**Dr Dave Parish is excited about new developments – and you can help too**

Our countryside, and that across the world, has been altered by our influence. Much of it now is far from being truly wild and, not surprisingly, this has led to many conservation challenges resulting in calls for action. Fortunately, in the 21st century, we have new tools and technology to help with this.

So, what is the best way to save valuable habitats and the species that rely on them in the face of urbanisation, deforestation, invasive non-native species and agricultural intensification?

Most ecologists now agree that intervention and active management of the landscapes and maintaining the right mix of habitats on an appropriate scale that will allow wildlife

to flourish, are crucial. The days of conservation through inaction are long gone, if they ever existed at all.

Wildlife management requires knowledge and understanding of the problems, and skill in applying solutions, without adding too great a burden on other land users. The latter may be controversial to some but is important: we have to appreciate that we cannot simply exclude competing interests; we have to find solutions acceptable to all.

Modern technology is now helping to inform wildlife management decisions. One excellent example is the use of drones. These have become widely available and skilled operators can access otherwise inaccessible areas, and conduct survey work, often from a significant

height. Drones can also be deployed to record a wide range of data from a very large area, often very quickly, compared with the 'old fashioned' alternative of tramping across the countryside with a notebook, binoculars and a compass. There is a huge saving in time and less disturbance to the wildlife.

Similar technology, greatly scaled up, is deployed by satellite. These are not just there to keep mobile phones working: many satellite networks collect data on land cover, temperature, gas emissions and, of course, the weather, and a lot more besides.

Such technology is great for providing data at landscape, and even countrywide, scales, but what if our interest is in the day-to-day lives of individual animals? Colleagues at

the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust have studied the movements of woodcock, a species of wading bird, using special tags as they migrate between the UK and their wintering grounds in Scandinavia and Russia.

These are carefully fitted to the bird and, once activated, communicate by satellite allowing real-time monitoring of where the birds go and how long they stay at each stopover on the way. This provides valuable data that fills a huge gap in their annual cycle, and helps to explain changes in the number of birds returning to breed, for example, that previously would have been impossible to monitor.

Sometimes wildlife management isn't about trying to increase animal numbers, but reducing or deterring them. Some conservation projects

may be so successful that their results create conflict with other land users.

One such case is that of sea eagles potentially killing farmers' lambs on Mull. The proposed solution is laser scaring devices. These medium-powered lasers emit a green light which, when projected onto the ground near the birds, scares them away effectively. The lasers have huge range and could allow farmers to quickly and easily scare eagles from large areas of land. The same applies to geese and other potential bird pests, but the technology hasn't yet been tried on mammals.

This is something GWCT is now looking at with multiple partners for the LIFE Laser Fence project. We hope to find ways to use lasers to keep some mammals out of areas we want

to protect, providing a valuable alternative to lethal methods of control. It might be possible to keep rats out of grain stores, or deer away from busy roads, without resorting to poisons or expensive permanent fencing.

Technology might seem out of reach to the average 'citizen scientist', but that isn't the case. Advances in mobile phones and apps mean that the public is equipped to help with many tasks like data gathering.

Modern phones with their capability to process and store large amounts of information could be used to help find and identify target species and record even quite complex data. There are simple apps that allow logging precise locations of findings – exploiting satellites again – and accessing software like map-

ping programmes. It is likely that wider and better results will be achieved with the help of the latest technology in the hands of the wider public – and we scientists are grateful for that.

*Dr Dave Parish, head of lowland research Scotland, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust.*



**HAVE YOUR SAY**  
www.scotsman.com

## ESSENTIAL READING. HALF PRICE



Subscribe to The Scotsman and enjoy your quality daily read at 50%\* OFF and choose your free book from the selection shown below ...  
**6 days £4.98 per week 7 days £5.98 per week**

Subscription also includes free access to the tablet edition worth £7.99 per month, meaning you can still enjoy your copy of The Scotsman wherever you are.

To take up this offer visit [localsubplus.co.uk/six](http://localsubplus.co.uk/six) and use the

code 341PA-SIX for The Scotsman or include Scotland on Sunday for seven days of news by visiting [localsubplus.co.uk/sco](http://localsubplus.co.uk/sco) and using the code 341PA-SCO or call 0330 123 5950 and quote your chosen code above



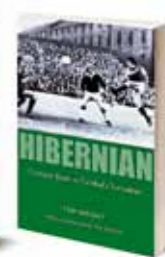
100 Favourite Scottish Love Poems Edited by Stewart Conn



Burnsiana by Calum Colvin and Rab Wilson



The Game of Golf by Willie Park Jr.



Hibernian: From Joe Baker to Turnbull's Tornadoes by Tom Wright



Hands on Hearts: A Physio's Tale by Alan Rae with Paul Kiddie



If History Was Scottish by Norman Ferguson



Notes of a Newsman: Witness to a Changing Scotland by John MacKay



Scots We Ken by Julie Davidson and Bob Dewar

Offer available to new subscribers only when paying by monthly Direct Debit. \* 50% discount available for the first three months, then 20% discount applies thereafter. Your free book will be sent to you after one month's subscription. Calls will be charged at your standard network rate.

### HOW TO BECOME A FRIEND

On these pages we present articles written by our Friends, with them setting their own agenda, using their own words. Being a Friend of The Scotsman is open to institutions, trade associations, professional bodies, societies, interest groups, charities and others. Individuals are not eligible nor, generally, are individual companies or political parties. The Friends of The Scotsman pages are a forum for discussion and debate and for the transfer of information rather than a marketplace. In return, the Friends sign up to a subscription package that ensures a supply of The Scotsman at a discount rate to the people in the organisation who require it. For more information, e-mail [mcgrory@scotsman.com](mailto:mcgrory@scotsman.com) or visit [www.scotsman.com](http://www.scotsman.com)